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ABSTRACT

When schools are closed due to declining student enrollment, students and materials must be relocated to a central facility. Problems encountered in consolidating the school libraries may include overcrowding of the central library, excessive duplication of material and equipment, and overwhelming clerical tasks for the librarian in charge of the consolidated facility. This paper offers advice on how to deal with these problems, as well as personnel conflicts, physical facility design, moving, and relations of the library with the community. (JAB)

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Guidelines for the Consolidation of School Libraries

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Guidelines for the Consolidation of School Libraries

There is often a unique emotional involvement with the elementary school library amongst the community whose school is to be closed due to declining enrollment. Many such libraries have been established and maintained by parent volunteers, and a great portion of their equipment and materials have been purchased with funds raised by the Parent-Teacher Organization for that specific purpose. It is, therefore, natural that when such a school is to be closed and merged with another, the community would want all of the library's resources to accompany its children to the new school. Unless the librarian of the receiving school is prepared to deal with this situation, she/he will find her/himself having to accept and absorb a multitude of unwanted gifts. It is much like the situation so poignantly presented in Sharon Bell Mathis' The Hundred Penny Box (Viking) when Aunt Dew is forced to give up her own home and move in with relatives. They love her and respect her desire to hold onto all of her treasured possessions, but at the same time they cannot make their own home unlivable by crowding in the furniture and accumulated belongings of another household.

The purpose of a school consolidation is primarily to provide and maintain better educational opportunities for the children in the face of declining enrollment. It follows, then, that when two school libraries are consolidated, it should result in a better library. This means that the consolidated facility should not be crowded with an excessive number of book cases to accommodate the entire collection received from the

school that has been closed. The books and audiovisual materials of both schools should be carefully weeded, eliminating deadwood and unnecessary duplication. The library should not be allowed to become a warehouse for every resource from the center that is to be closed simply because it is the easiest way out, or because no one knows what else to do with them, or because it is a way of appeasing the emotions and nostalgia of a community whose school is no more. It must be remembered that the unwanted materials remain long after emotions have cooled and people have adjusted to their new situation. If anything and everything is accepted, the librarian - unless given additional clerical help and unlimited space - will be dragged down and drained of energy and time by them. The real work of the librarian is with the children of the consolidated school, and not with the paper work which the consolidation entails.

Procedures for the Consolidation of Two School Libraries

Personnel

When plans for the consolidation are first being discussed, find out which librarian is to be in charge of the consolidated facility. When that often painful decision has been made, the librarian-in-charge should assert her/himself and see that the consolidation of the two libraries is properly carried out.

The Facility Itself

Look at the physical plant of the consolidated facility. What improvements does it need? How much room is available for absorbing the closing school's collection and furniture? (If you don't want a crowded room full of book cases and without space for activities, speak up <u>now</u>!) If the help of a professional consultant is available, find out exactly

how much money can be spent for remodeling and improving the facility. Approach such plans realistically.

The Collection

Use the consolidation as an opportunity to improve the quality - not just the quantity - of the collection. Watch out for the argument that the consolidation is a good thing because now the library has twice as many books. Who needs six copies of Little Women, anyway? Remember that the consolidation means a brand new unit, not just two old units coming together. See that only the best is retained.

In order to preserve as much open space in the library as possible, weed both collections, not just that of the library that is closing. This will eliminate the need for an excessive number of additional book cases. Keep the standards established in your library's Material Selection Policy in mind, keeping only those materials which meet the criteria for excellence.

Begin a Historical Interest Shelf with some of the old treasures that you come across. They make excellent teaching tools for raising consciousness about racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism in children's books.

The Move Itself

Ask that the packing of books and materials from the closing center be done according to your specifications so that when they are delivered, you can deal with them more efficiently. This might involve packing all the poetry books together, for example, and labeling the outside of the carton.

If teachers from the closing school are joining the faculty of

the consolidated school, ask them to select a reasonable number of materials from their library which they would like to have available first. These selected items should be packed and delivered to the receiving school as soon as possible so that they may receive priority in cataloging and processing, as well as serving as a "pilot project" for the thousands of materials still to come. By working with a limited number of items, the librarian of the receiving school can establish procedures for integrating the two collections.

Chances are that it will prove more efficient to discard the catalog cards of the facility that is closing than to trace and remove all of the cards representing the materials to be integrated into the new collection. However, these cards will be useful in the initial steps of cataloging, and should be sent intact to the receiving school at the same time as the first shipment of books.

Make Haste Slowly

Insist that the consolidated library be closed long enough for basic reorganization to be accomplished. Although cartons of unpacked books will probably be in evidence for a long time, a preliminary planning time is needed to arrange floor space and to set up procedures for integrating the two collections.

Public Relations

It is vital to respect and care for that which is obviously precious to the community of the closing school. The library is often the depository for historical archives of the local neighborhood. This is not to be confused with items one might describe as "deadwood."

Have a definite plan for the distribution of materials which

you do not want to accept. Suggest that the excess be offered to other schools, public libraries, day-care centers, and hospitals. (Of course, the materials referred to here are duplications. They are not in poor condition or out-of-date.) The Parent-Teacher Organization may want to have a Used Book Sale and present the proceeds to the new library for something that is really needed.

If you must accept everything that is offered to you, make no promises. Store the unwanted materials in cartons and deal with them after the consolidation is no longer a "hot" issue. By then much of the heat and fire of closing the school will have vanished, and you will be free to consider the materials from a professional point of view.

Final Words of Advice

Watch for budget cuts following the consolidation. Be prepared to explain that despite the thousands of books and audiovisual materials recently added to your collection, new titles must continue to be purchased.

Assert yourself. Remember that when the dust settles, you are the one who will have to live with the situation.

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